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SIPDIS

INTERIOR FOR US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY - INTERNATIONAL WATER  
PARIS PASS TO UNESCO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [XF](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: Biblical River Jordan Now Sewage-Laden, Drying Up

1. This is a joint Embassy Amman - Embassy Tel Aviv message.

2. Summary: The NGO Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) organized a symposium on March 8 on Peace Island (Bakoura Island) for representatives from Jordan, Israeli, the Palestinian Authority and the international community to discuss rehabilitation of the Jordan River. The Jordan's flow is less than 10 percent of its former level, and a large percentage of that is untreated sewage. Speakers noted that riparian states would need to redirect fresh water supplies to the river if the Jordan is to regain its health. End summary.

Speakers Stress Cooperation but Don't Make Commitments

3. Key speakers included Prince Al-Hassan of Jordan, Israeli Environment Minister Shalom Simchon, UNESCO Deputy Director General Mounir Bouchenaki, and Pekka Haavisto, Director of the UN Environment Program Post-Conflict Assessment Unit. Embassy Tel Aviv ESTH Officer and Embassy Amman Econcouns attended. In his remarks, Amman Econcouns stressed the importance of the parties working together to resolve water and environmental issues and to achieve sustainable peace in the region. Prince Hassan and Israeli Environment Minister Simchon also made remarks in that spirit but without making specific commitments. Although the Palestinian Authority was not represented at the ministerial level, Palestinian local officials and specialists participated actively in the discussions. There were many media representatives in attendance.

Flow Down from 1.3 Billion to 100 Million Cubic Meters

4. Symposium speakers noted that the river is under threat of drying up altogether during summer and being reduced to a meager flow in the winter because of water diversions by Israel, Jordan and Syria. Over the past fifty years, annual flows have dropped from 1.3 billion cubic meters per year to less than 100 million cubic meters per year, of which some 20 million cubic meters is untreated sewage, according to FOEME. The highly polluted Jordan River ends at the Dead Sea, itself under threat because of having shrunk by 30 percent in the last fifty years as its major source, the Jordan River, has been depleted.

"Crossing the Jordan" Concept Document

5. Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) has called for the Jordan River, an important river for Christians, Jews and Muslims, to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. FOEME experts from Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority prepared and presented a concept document at the symposium entitled "Crossing the Jordan." (See [http://www.foeme.org/publications/crossing\\_the\\_jordan.pdf](http://www.foeme.org/publications/crossing_the_jordan.pdf)). The document focuses on the heritage, water resources and biodiversity of the Jordan River Valley. Its goal is rehabilitating the river, promoting prosperity in the Jordan basin and helping to bring peace to the region. FOEME and other speakers at the symposium argued for cooperation in the region to treat sewage before it enters the Jordan River and to develop tourism as an alternative to water-intensive agriculture.

FOEME's Declaration

6. FOEME also issued a unilateral declaration as follows:

(begin quote)

Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME)  
Peace Island Declaration for the Lower Jordan River Valley:

The Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian representatives who met at the Peace Island on Tuesday 8th March, 2005 to jointly discuss a concept document entitled "Crossing the Jordan" for the rehabilitation, the promotion of prosperity and the help of bringing peace to the Lower Jordan River Valley, acknowledged and thanked the Patron HRH Prince Hassan of Jordan, the Hosts and Donors for their support and encouragement and UNESCO for its concerns.

The representatives in recognizing:

-- the universal natural and cultural significance of the area;  
-- that current practices are at the demise of natural and cultural values and at the expense of peoples' livelihoods;  
-- that all peoples/riparians along the Valley must share the benefits of the resources of the valley but that in so doing the right balance must be struck with nature;  
-- the introduction of sustainable tourism - along and/or crossing the Jordan - is one of the economic activities that can promote sustainable development and bring prosperity to the valley;

Called upon the three governments to:

-- make a commitment for the ecological rehabilitation of the River Jordan based on their signed peace treaties and/or agreements, and that now is the time to implement that commitment before damage done becomes irreversible;  
-- prevent ongoing pollution and return sufficient quantities of clean water back to the Jordan River;  
-- appropriate UNESCO and UNEP mechanisms as a strong basis for ecological rehabilitation of the river and valley;  
-- develop a coordinated and collaborative Integrated Environmental Management Plan including the Tangible and Intangible Heritage of the valley together with extensive public participation;

And further invited the international community to:

-- give support to the project through the UNESCO, UNEP and other mechanisms;  
-- adopt and give technical and financial assistance towards its implementation;  
-- develop academic networking to research and monitor the rehabilitation of the valley and river.

(end quote)

Comment

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17. For health reasons, you would not want to be baptized in some sections of the Jordan River these days. The task of rehabilitating it is daunting. The symposium highlighted the current sad state of the river and helped identify hard decisions and major actions that governments need to take to rehabilitate the river. End comment.

HALE